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Research article

## The precedent phenomenon of “Crime and Punishment” in Russian media discourse

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**Abstract.** The comprehensive study of the title of the novel “Crime and Punishment” by F.M. Dostoevsky as a source of precedence in the texts of Russian media is presented. The relevance of the research is determined by the need to study fiction as a valuable source of precedence in modern media discourse. Manipulative nature of modern media implies the expansion of the spheres-sources of precedence, appealing to the cultural background of the Russian linguistic culture bearers. The authors prove that the formation of the actual media space is based on a wide set of connotatively marked linguistic means, used as a tool to influence the potential reader. On the example of the precedent construction “Crime and Punishment”, appealing to the title of the famous novel by F.M. Dostoevsky, semantic-pragmatic and transformational features of precedent constructions and the specificity of their associative potential in the perception and interpretation in the Russian linguistic culture are illustrated. The research material includes texts of electronic media covering international, state, and regional issues and problems from 2017 to 2022. The research results are ensured by a wide repertoire of publications reflecting various aspects of society and state development. The card index included contexts (corpus of 120 examples), objectifying important social, economic, and political problems for modern society. The component and contextual analysis, distributive method, linguistic modeling were applied. Further study of the precedent phenomena appealing to fiction could present a valuable fragment of the media picture of the world, including the corpus of texts significant for the Russian linguistic culture.

**Keywords:** media space, media text, linguistic picture of the world, linguistic culture, precedent construction, connotation, interpretation, semantics, pragmatics, Russian language

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## Introduction

Russian media space is increasingly becoming a virtual arena where polar opinions, beliefs, and political positions collide (research by A.N. Baranov (Baranov et al., 2021), E.V. Budaev (Budaev, Chudinov, 2020), M.B. Voroshilova (Voroshilova, 2013), N.D. Golev (Golev, Spilnaya, 2021), T.G. Dobrosklonskaya (Dobrosklonskaya, 2008), A. Blackledge (Blackledge, 2005), D. Holmes (Holmes, 2005). In modeling the modern media reality, the units of image system, accumulated in the Russian linguistic consciousness and implemented in contexts as precedent ones, are valuable. The attention of scientists is mainly focused on revealing the specifics of precedent units in the texts of modern media, their dependence on the pragmatic settings of the media text author (works by D.B. Gudkov (Gudkov, 1997, 1999), K.N. Dubrovina (Dubrovina, 2012), Y.N. Karaulov (Karaulov, 2001), V.G. Kostomarov (Kostomarov, 1999), V.V. Krasnykh (Krasnykh, 1997), E.A. Nakhimova (Nakhimova, Chudinov, 2016), E.V. Rakhilina (Rakhilina, 2000), I.V. Savelyeva (Savelyeva, 2021), G.G. Slyshkin (Slyshkin, 2000), S.I. Smetanina (Smetanina, 2002), A.P. Chudinov (Chudinov, 2013) and others). Researchers prove that it is the alternation of “expression and standard”, characteristic of the precedent phenomena in media space, makes them most demanded when manipulating the mass reader (L.G. Babenko,<sup>1</sup> E.N. Basovskaya (Basovskaya, 2020), L.A. Butakhina (Butakhina, Phillipova, 2012), N.A. Golubeva (Golubeva, 2022), Y.A. Gunko (Gunko, 2002), A.E. Suprun (Suprun, 1995), J. Charteris-Black (Charteris-Black, 2004) and others).

The study of fiction as a source of precedence in modern media discourse is a trend today. Thus, D.B. Gudkov and I.I. Chumak-Zhun draw attention to the changes in precedent phenomena included in the mass communicative consciousness, proving the dependence of such changes on the evolution of the cognitive base of the Russian language speakers (Gudkov, 1999; Chumak-Zhun, 2018). Linguists emphasize that the cognitive base of this or that ethnic group is the ideas about the preserved precedent constructions, and not the constructions themselves. Appealing to a precedent text implies that the addressee has an invariant in its perception (Gudkov, 1997: 126), but these “invariants” of the addresser and the addressee usually do not coincide fully. G.G. Slyshkin discusses the loss of the denotative content of the precedent construction from the fiction text when it is implemented in a media text. He emphasizes that the “literary form” may lose its relevance, but the precedent language units will “continue to function as a cultural symbol” (Slyshkin, 2000: 91).

There is no doubt that Russian classical literature can be considered one of the most valuable and multifaceted sources of precedence. The names of fiction

<sup>1</sup> Babenko, L.G. (2004). *Philological analysis of the text. Fundamentals of theory, principles and aspects of analysis: Textbook for universities*. Moscow: Akademicheskii Proekt Publ.; Yekaterinburg: Delovaya kniga Publ. (In Russ.)

texts, anthroponyms, toponyms, common phrases form the basis of the names and constructions which in the first third of the 21st century became precedent and received a significant associative and pragmatic potential. In particular, F.M. Dostoyevsky's novel “Crime and Punishment” includes a wide range of names, constructions and situations that are actively implemented in contemporary media space at the level of secondary nomination. As E.N. Remchukova and L.A. Kuzmina note, the explication of national archetypes in journalistic texts indicates “the ingrowing of Dostoevsky's concepts into living non-literary speech” (Remchukova & Kuzmina, 2022: 51) and gives an opportunity to “use it as a ‘cipher’ to characterize social and moral phenomena” (Ibid.). The relevance of the proposed article is determined by the need to analyze the dynamics of the precedent construction “Crime and Punishment” basing on a detailed examination of its differential characteristics from its appearance in the text-source to its present state – its functioning in modern publicist texts-recipients.

**The aim of the research** is a comprehensive study of the title of the novel “Crime and Punishment” by F.M. Dostoevsky as a source of precedence in the Russian media discourse of 2017–2022.

### **Methods and materials**

The source of the analyzed material was the texts of electronic media covering international, state, and regional issues and problems from 2017 to 2022. In particular, the texts of online versions of the following newspapers and magazines were used: “Argumenty i Fakty”, “Vedomosti”, “Vremya Novostei”, “Gudok”, “Moskovskie Novosti”, “Nezavisimaya Gazeta”, “Profil”, “Parlament-skaya Gazeta”, “Rossiskaya Gazeta”, “Segodnia”, and materials from regional press. Contexts (a corpus of 120 examples) that objectify important social, economic, and political problems for modern society were included in the card index. The following methods were used in the work: component and contextual analysis, distributive method and linguistic modeling. In addition, the descriptive method and the method of introspection, appealing to the linguistic intuition of the authors, seem to be relevant for preparing materials of the article. It is a comprehensive approach to the studying precedent phenomena that makes it possible to characterize the specificity of a particular unit and the peculiarities of its adaptation in the linguistic consciousness of the bearers of Russian linguistic culture in the most detailed and multidimensional way.

### **Results**

The conducted research proved:

– the formation of the topical media space is based on a wide set of connotatively marked linguistic means, used as a tool to influence the potential addressee;

– the characteristic of precedent constructions as functional units, simultaneously belonging to linguistic, cultural, and cognitive spheres, determines the peculiarities of their analysis considering their cognitive conditionality. The corpus of figurative means, modeled by the author, is determined by the peculiarities of their denotative content, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, by the specificity of their connotation and extralinguistic background;

– on the example of the precedent construction “Crime and Punishment”, appealing to the title of the famous novel by F.M. Dostoevsky, the article illustrates the semantic-pragmatic and transformational features of precedent constructions and the specificity of their associative potential in their precepting and interpreting in the Russian linguistic culture;

– the use of precedent units in the texts of modern media emphasizes the imperfection of the legal and political systems and transmits an emotional charge to the content of the text, which is determined by the pragmatic attitudes of the media product author;

– in journalism, precedent phenomena often parody the attributes of modern reality and are based on language games and background knowledge of the addressee. It is the significance of fiction in modeling the background knowledge in the Russian national consciousness that determines its important role as a source of precedence in Russian media discourse.

## Discussion

This article addresses the title of the novel “Crime and Punishment” by F.M. Dostoevsky as a source of precedence in the Russian media space.

The analysis shows that in the aspect of precedent phenomena structure appealing to the novel by F.M. Dostoevsky, we can distinguish constructions that have retained their form, but changed their pragmatic potential, as well as those where both content and form are transformed (expansion, narrowing or substitution of one or more components). The construction “crime and punishment” in media texts retains its form, provided that it is realized in the following meanings:

1) describes a specific event, where the crime and punishment has already occurred, with the reader's attention focused on the immediate comprehension of the situation that occurred;

2) appeals to comprehension of possible crimes and demonstrates the legislative side of social reality, points out that any crime is followed by the punishment.

Let us turn to the contexts that prove this thesis. The most active in the media are texts covering corruption and demonstrating the relevant situations. It is indicative that such contexts have the construction “crime and punishment” in the headline *“Crime and Punishment. Tarsk City Court Considered the Criminal*

*Case Against the Former Head of Yekaterininsky Rural Settlement*".<sup>2</sup> In further context, the offence (theft of funds and abuse of power) and the ensuing punishment is described, in the form of 1.5 year's imprisonment with a probation period of 10 months. The following example can also be analyzed according to a similar model: "**Crime and Punishment. A Traffic Police Inspector was Brought to Responsibility**".<sup>3</sup> The unfolding of the context shows that the crime is the demand of a bribe in the amount of 20,000 rubles, and the punishment is the criminal liability that follows.

Articles of this kind are quite monotonous, created mainly to highlight events that are relevant exclusively to a particular region and are not significant for the general reader. In such cases, the authors need the precedent structure to focus the attention of the potential reader on the local problems of the place where he or she lives. We should also note that none of the proposed articles mentioned the act of self-mutilation or, directly, murder. Thus, the main motif conveyed in F.M. Dostoevsky's novel is lost, and in the context, explicit information is realized, reproduced solely in the semantic load of words.

There are interesting examples of newspaper articles, which are not connected to the topic of corruption, but belong to the first category of texts: "**Crime and Punishment. For Stealing Railway Property – to the Dock**".<sup>4</sup> Just like in the examples presented above, this context lacks information related to the crime (murder) committed by R. Raskolnikov.

The following context clearly expands the boundaries of the discussed precedent construction, because in this situation it appeals not to a specific subject, but to mankind: "**Crime and Punishment. Revenge is a Dish Best Served Smelly**".<sup>5</sup> The "crime" in this article is human negligence and indifference to everybody but himself. Cutting down the trees led to the fact that they, by putting their roots as low as possible to survive, damaged the sewer, and soon the city streets were filled with the contents of the sewer pipes. According to the author of the article, this is a deserved punishment.

The articles discussing potential crimes are quite interesting. Here are the most revealing contexts: "**Crime and Punishment. For Illegal Hunting and Trade in Red Book Animals, a Punishment in the Form of Imprisonment from 2**

<sup>2</sup> In Tarsk district, a former head of a rural settlement was convicted of illegally awarding himself. (2020, December 2). *News of the Government of Omsk Region*. (In Russ.) Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <http://omskregion.info/news/81605>

<sup>3</sup> If you gave a bribe to a traffic cop, what would happen for it? (2019, March 22). *Pravo.ru*. (In Russ.) Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <https://елецкий.48.мвд.рф/новости/news>

<sup>4</sup> Go ahead. For stealing railway property – to the dock. (2017, September 26). *Gudok*. (In Russ.) Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <https://gudok.ru/zdr/167/?ID=1387744>

<sup>5</sup> Crime and punishment. (2020, December 23.) *Gazeta-n1*. (In Russ.) Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <https://gazeta-n1.ru/news/society/93899/>

to 9 Years Could Be Introduced”;<sup>6</sup> **“Crime and Punishment. Criminal Responsibility for Almost All Crimes Starts at the Age of 16 and for Some Crimes – at the age of 14”**.<sup>7</sup> We emphasize that the last example tells the reader about the rules for arrest and the age when a person can already be legally responsible on their own: this article is introductory, it can be used for educational purposes as a prevention of crime among young people.

Having analyzed the texts that include the precedent construction without changes in its structure, we can conclude that the authors are guided mostly by explicit information. We did not find any repetition of the story described in the novel, which means that in the presented media texts there is no projection on the novel.

As the analysis showed, this structure in a transformed form is included much more often: journalists change the place of its components, replace them and add other words. Let us turn to the analysis of the contexts.

The information resource “Versia” published an article with the title **“Crime and Punishment in English”**.<sup>8</sup> In this case, the original construction is supplemented with an adverb, which imposes fundamentally new meanings. The article provides the reader with information about several foreign TV series that are to be shown on major Russian TV channels. All these series are of detective genre. Each series is dedicated to the disclosure of a particular “crime” and the subsequent demonstration of the trial, at the end the accused and the audience necessarily hear the “punishment”. The precedent construction is chosen because the authors want to focus the readers’ attention on a familiar phrase and to warm up their interest. We should also note that the article under analysis is the first of those which preserves association with the original source, the novel by F.M. Dostoyevsky. “Crime and Punishment in English” is a lengthy project devoted to the committed crimes and the expected punishments, and the component “in English” focuses attention on the new sounding of the construction, new reflected realities.

**“Punishment for the crime”**.<sup>9</sup> In the presented context, there is an inversion with component substitution. The author interchanged the words, replaced the conjunction “and” with the preposition “for”. In this way, the author sought the reader’s associative projection on the book, he did not want the analogy to be

<sup>6</sup> Krasny Tundrovik. (2018, January 28). (In Russ.) Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <https://nvinder.ru/article/vypusk-no-7-20638-ot-25-yanvary-a-2018-g/31047-prestuplenie-i-nakazanie>

<sup>7</sup> Crime and punishment. Features of criminal responsibility of minors. (2020, July 31). *Urenskie Vesti*. (In Russ.) Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <https://urenvesti.ru/articles/media/2020/7/31/prestuplenie-i-nakazanie/>

<sup>8</sup> Versia. (2021, August 13). (In Russ.) Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <http://versia.co.il/prestuplenie-i-nakazanie-po-anglijski/>

<sup>9</sup> Punishment for the crime. (2018, May 4). *Kortkerossky District Newspaper*. (In Russ.) Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <http://zvezdakomi.ru/news/media/2018/5/10/nakazanie-za-prestuplenie/>

too obvious, but a native bearer of the Russian linguistic culture can draw a parallel quite easily. The article tells the story of a murder committed because of a conflict. A resident of the Kortkerossky region stabbed his neighbor several times, and then tried to escape. It should be noted that the motive of the crime, taken from the novel, remains the same. The circumstances, the motive, and the weapon of the crime are completely different from what is presented in the novel.

*“Punishment for the Crime That Never Was”*.<sup>10</sup> The beginning of the presented title coincides with the previous one, but it is continued, filled with additional semantic components. The modified form “punishment for the crime” is specified with “which did not happen”. Such a supplement focuses the reader’s attention on the unfairness of the situation and makes him understand the event as an absurd one. The article tells the story of a man who was first slandered and then convicted for six years for a crime he had not committed. The most tragic thing is that the authorities recognized the mistake only after the term of his imprisonment ended.

Relevant for scientific research are constructions with added adjectives that focus attention on the national specificity of the perception of fiction and its film adaptation: *“Russian Crime and Finnish Punishment”*.<sup>11</sup> The article talks about the Finnish adaptation and film version of the novel “Crime and Punishment” by F.M. Dostoevsky, which differs greatly from the Russian version: the murder there was committed with a firearm, not an axe, and the victim was not an old moneylender, but a businessman. Nevertheless, according to the film’s author, Aki Kaurismäki, the ideological component is fully preserved. However, the author of the article does not agree with this; he cannot agree with the juxtaposition of Rodion Raskolnikov and the main character Antti Rahikainen in the film. He believes that the motives of the characters are different: Rodion Raskolnikov decides to commit a crime because of ideological considerations, he wishes to test his own theory, while Antti, the main character of the film, commits a murder to a greater extent from the desire for revenge and only afterwards tries to justify himself through philosophical considerations. The author is convinced that the punishment for Raskolnikov lies more in his realization of the worthlessness and inconsistency of the theory that he himself invented. The punishment for Antto’s crime was his constant fear of being caught, hence the title of the article: a Russian crime should be followed by a Russian punishment, referring the reader, of course, to the novel by Dostoevsky. A Finnish crime could be similar, but it would never be “Russian”, and neither, accordingly, would the punishment.

<sup>10</sup> *MIP.Group*. (2018, February 13). (In Russ.) Retrieved October 21, 2022, from risk-inform.ru

<sup>11</sup> *God.Literatury.RF*. (2020, May 20). (In Russ.) Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <https://godliteratury.ru/articles>

The analysis showed that it is very common to expand the context by means of a locative indicating the place where the crime was committed. Let us confirm with an example: “*Crime and Punishment in Verkhnedneprovsky*”.<sup>12</sup> It is interesting that this is the only context (at the time of this analysis), where there is only “crime”, and “punishment”, according to the author, should be, but he is not sure whether it is possible. The article touches on the topic of corruption, but as it was noted earlier, the story has no conclusion, it ends with the “crime”: it talks about embezzlement of funds from the town's budget. The author of the article and town residents hope that they will succeed in drawing public attention to the situation and initiating “punishment”.

The analysis shows that most of the articles where the studied construction is somehow transformed have certain similarities. Often these articles are united around one topic, which is indicated with one or more additional components in the construction. As a rule, such articles are aimed at covering a specific problem; they are never topical but consider the problem in its clear diachronic connection with other similar problems. Let us consider some examples.

The theme-rheme division of the sentence determines that transformed precedent constructions, as a rule, contain the new information in postposition, but our analysis identified other constructions.

Here is the example – “*Drugs, Crime and Punishment*”.<sup>13</sup> A new component in preposition is included to specify the crime: the crime in the proposed article is related to drugs and cannot be different from the topic in the title. The article shows a sad statistic, presenting information that the number of people detained and charged with drug-related offenses has recently increased significantly. The author of the article proposes to strengthen the penalties and believes that this is the only way to reduce the number of such crimes.

Prepositional components can use other substantives, which nominate crimes and offenses, discussed in the text: “*Counterfeiting: Crime and Punishment*”<sup>14</sup> and “*Human Trafficking: Crime and Punishment*”.<sup>15</sup>

In media texts, the constructions based on contamination are unique, and such contamination includes the second component, which also appeals to fiction: “*A Hero of Our Time: Crime and Punishment*”.<sup>16</sup> The article tells the story

<sup>12</sup> *Smolenskaya Pravda*. (2019, July 16). (In Russ.) Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <https://smolpravda.ru/2019/07/prestuplenie-i-nakazanie-v-verkhnedne/>

<sup>13</sup> *Drugs, Crime and Punishment*. (2022, 17 June). *Info-Kizlyar*. (In Russ.) Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <https://info-kizlyar.ru/news/media/2022/6/17/narkotiki-prestuplenie-i-nakazanie/>

<sup>14</sup> *Pandia*. (2020, May 27). (In Russ.) Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <https://pandia.ru/text/80/045/21212.php>

<sup>15</sup> *Human trafficking: Crime, punishment and labor legislation*. (2010, March 10). *Golos Ameriki*. (In Russ.) Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <https://www.golosameriki.com/a/human-trafficking-2010-03-01-85899062/183288.html>

<sup>16</sup> *Pechorin's Crime and Punishment*. *Litra.ru*. (In Russ.) Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <http://www.litra.ru/composition/get/coid/00099001184864108457/woid/00089901184773069424/>



of Internet fraudsters who hack the accounts of political actors of other states. The specificity of the crime is that it is condemned by the authorities of a foreign state, while compatriots assess such actions not as a crime but as one of the components of the information war, where hackers fight on the side of own state.

### Conclusion

Thus, we concluded that the processes and phenomena observed in modern society cause a lot of associations and allusions in the Russian linguistic consciousness, which is primarily due to the need for an adequate perception of reality, correct interpretation of events, their explanation through already accumulated social and individual experience. This determines that classical fiction today is a powerful source of information, which forms the basis of national consciousness and self-consciousness of each individual, is available to a large number of recipients and, of course, has national specificity.

The linguistic and cognitive features of precedent constructions with the sphere-source “fiction” are that they fix the historical, cultural and linguistic experience of representatives of a certain national tradition, act as stereotypes, which to a large extent forms the behavior model of a linguistic personality. As the study proved, such features can be fully traced when referring to the novel “Crime and Punishment” by F.M. Dostoevsky, which is an important source of precedence, accumulating the value attitudes of the addressee and the recipient, their background knowledge and erudition.

The prospect for further study of precedent constructions appealing to fiction lies in the modelling of a fragment of the media picture of the world, including a list of texts significant for Russian linguistic culture. The theoretical material studied by the authors and the empirical data obtained can be included in the general body of scientific works devoted to media discourse and serve as a basis for the prospective study of the communicative, pragmatic and transformational potential of precedent constructions as a valuable fragment of the actual media space.

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Научная статья

## Прецедентный феномен «Преступление и наказание» в русскоязычном медиадискурсе

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**Аннотация.** Комплексно исследуется название романа Ф.М. Достоевского «Преступление и наказание» как источник прецедентности в текстах русскоязычных СМИ. Актуальность определяется необходимостью изучения художественной литературы как ценного источника прецедентности в современном медиадискурсе. Манипулятивный характер современных СМИ предполагает расширение сфер-источников прецедентности, апеллирующих к культурному фону носителей русской лингвокультуры. Доказывается, что в основе формирования актуального медиапространства лежит широкий набор коннотативно маркированных языковых средств, используемых в качестве инструмента влияния на потенциального адресата. На примере прецедентной конструкции «Преступление и на-

казание», апеллирующей к названию известного романа Ф.М. Достоевского, иллюстрируются семантико-прагматические и трансформационные особенности прецедентных конструкций и специфика их ассоциативного потенциала в восприятии и интерпретации носителей русской лингвокультуры. Материалом исследования послужили тексты электронных СМИ, освещающие международные, государственные и региональные вопросы и проблемы за период с 2017 по 2022 г. Достоверность результатов обеспечена широким репертуаром изданий, отражающих различные аспекты развития общества и государства. В картотеку включены контексты (корпус из 120 примеров), объективирующие важные для современного общества социальные, экономические и политические проблемы. Применялись компонентный и контекстологический анализ, дистрибутивный метод, лингвистическое моделирование. Дальнейшее изучение прецедентных феноменов, апеллирующих к художественной литературе, позволит представить ценный фрагмент медийной картины мира, включающий корпус значимых для русской лингвокультуры текстов.

**Ключевые слова:** медиапространство, медиатекст, языковая картина мира, лингвокультура, прецедентная конструкция, коннотация, интерпретация, семантика, прагматика, русский язык

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